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Date of publication: June 22, 1999

Source: ILRF

Project to Prepare Local NGOs for Fair Labor Association Monitoring Process

Twenty-two colleges and universities affiliated with the Fair Labor Association (FLA) are making it possible for the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF), one of the founders of the FLA, to conduct a one-year pilot project to increase the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including labor unions, to participate effectively in the monitoring processes of the FLA. The project is designed both to provide on-the-job training for NGOs in four countries in Asia and Latin America, and to develop materials and protocols that the FLA can use in future NGO training programs throughout the world.

“For colleges and universities, effective participation in monitoring by local NGOs is one of the key features of the FLA,” said Robert K. Durkee, vice president for public affairs at Princeton University and one of the originators of the project. “We saw this project as one way that we could help to increase the number of NGOs—now and into the future—that will have the skills and training necessary to participate effectively in monitoring, and even to qualify as accredited FLA monitors.”

Pharis J. Harvey, executive director of the ILRF, said: “We are grateful for this encouragement and support of our efforts to ensure that locally-based representatives of workers and of the human rights and religious communities in developing countries will be able to participate meaningfully in the FLA monitoring process. While only a one-year pilot, this project will allow our organization and the FLA to gain experience that we can apply in conducting future training programs and in improving the FLA’s monitoring methodology as the FLA becomes fully operational later this year.”

The total budget for the project will be approximately \$200,000. The largest single contributor will be St. John’s University in New York, which announced last week that it was contributing \$70,000 to this initiative. Other contributors, of varying amounts, include: Brown University, Colby College, Columbia University, Connecticut College, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, the University of Delaware, Duke University, Harvard University, the University of Memphis, Northwestern University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Pittsburgh, Princeton University, Rutgers University, Santa Clara University, the University of Southern California, Trinity College, Wheaton College, and Yale University.

The participating schools are among the 100 colleges and universities that have affiliated with the recently incorporated FLA and are members of its University Advisory Council, which held its first meeting today.

The ILRF will consult with the participating colleges and universities in selecting four countries where companies that provide merchandise for these schools operate and sweatshop practices have been

identified. Within these countries, existing NGOs and unions that are interested and have a basis for qualification as monitors will be identified. The project will provide an intensive and rapid training program to equip the NGOs with the background knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the FLA monitoring process, and the NGOs will be given on-the-job training in pilot monitoring programs.

Under the FLA charter, companies seeking FLA certification must adopt the organization's Workplace Code of Conduct and participate in both internal company monitoring and external monitoring by independent accredited monitors according to specified principles. These principles require that both the companies and the independent external monitors consult regularly with labor, human rights, religious, or other local institutions as part of their monitoring processes. The external monitors are required to utilize local NGOs "to facilitate communication with company employees and employees of contractors and suppliers, both in the conduct of employee interviews and in the reporting of noncompliance." NGOs themselves are eligible to seek accreditation by the FLA as external monitors.

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